Feminist interventions

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Feminist Interventions: Revising the Canon

Patricia Allmer

Women have always been significant, even foundational, figures in the histories of Dada and Surrealism. Many women artists developed and used dada and surrealist techniques, or contributed in multiple ways to the productions of the movements. These women's works helped create some of the conditions of representation necessary for subsequent women's rights activism, along with contemporary feminisms and women's wider political interventions into structures of oppression. Evidence of this political activism can be found, for example, in the lives of Hannah Höch, Adrienne Monnier, Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Lohringhoven, Madame Yevonde, Lee Miller, Frida Kahlo, Claude Cahun, Toyen, Suzanne Césaire, Lucie Thésée, and Birgit Jürgenssen.

Such feminist interventions can be understood on one level as (dis-)locations in which Dada and Surrealism actually fulfill their declared potential to be truly revolutionary, and indeed to be and stay politically relevant. Yet, as is clear from the discussion that follows, critical and popular histories of Dada and Surrealism have often preferred to construct a markedly different story, one that sometimes partially but often altogether omits women artists and their actual presence in publications, exhibitions, and collections. Periodically their excision from critical accounts creates conditions for their "rediscovery," a notion making them vulnerable to being ideologically constructed as "little-known" and thus devoid of influence. A "rediscovered" artist can have had little influence during the period prior to her "rediscovery." Nevertheless, even a cursory review of surrealist and dada history shows that on the contrary, many of these women were founders, innovators, and major influences within and across dada and surrealist traditions, making the subsequent exclusion or marginalization of their works and influences from historical accounts seem all the more deliberate.

In accounting for these exclusions and constructions, we should bear in mind Marsha Meskimmon's argument that

> to define women artists as a homogenous cohort, irrespective of the dynamics of their histories, or to seek in women's art some monolithic "female essence," preceding specific practices as their knowable "origin point," erases differences between women and reinstates the exclusionary paradigm which rendered female subjectivity invisible, illegible and impossible to articulate. Moving beyond that logic to engage with women's art and

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> radical difference interrogates traditional modes of historical enquiry, the nature of the artist, concepts of authorship, intentionality and the very definition of "art."
>
> Meskimmon (2003, 3)

An initial problem in reassessing their contributions is that many women artists cannot simply be labeled "dada" or "surrealist" artists, as their affiliations to either movement constitute only a part of their total career aesthetic output. This complexity in turn challenges conventional tendencies to represent "movements," histories, artistic personalities, canons, and thoughts as coherent, linear, discrete, complete entities. It suggests that the work of many women artists might productively be reassessed in terms of their intersections with moments and events, practices and productions, rather than as sources or threads or trajectories within wider narratives.

This essay will analyze a few specific moments in the history of exclusions, forgettings, and "rediscoveries" that constitutes the critical tradition of accounting for (or failing to account for) women working in Dada and Surrealism. As Patricia Hill Collins notes, there is a danger in giving examples of the homogenizing effects of "selecting a few" (Collins 2000, viii). The examples discussed here have profoundly shaped critical understanding of Dada and Surrealism. They are brought together to shed light on the androcentric historicisations, exclusions, and historical appropriations, which present themselves as monolithic knowledge, repeatedly asserted in major exhibitions and publications. More nuanced understanding exposes this ostensibly monolithic knowledge as at best partial and selective, and at worst simply wrong.

Feminist Revisions of Women in Dada and Surrealism

Women dadaists were widely ignored within histories of Dada until the 1980s and 1990s. Ruth Hemus analyses in *Dada's Women* how women artists and writers (such as Céline Arnauld, Suzanne Duchamp, Sophie Taeuber, and Emmy Hennings) have been represented in conventional Dada histories. She finds that they "do not fare well":

> Often, where their names appear they are accompanied by nothing than a few scant details. Frequently, these are biographical points of interest, with little or even no information provided about the nature and reach of the work. … Many women … were involved in personal relationships with men in the group and they are generally referred to in relation to their more famous male counterparts. One often reads about an individual as the wife of, the girlfriend of, the lover of, the mistress of or the sister of a better-known protagonist.
>
> Hemus (2009, 3)

There are two main reasons for this lack of recognition. First, "many of the best-known accounts of Dada were, and remain, those written by the male dadaists themselves" (Hemus 2009), who often neglected even to mention their female colleagues. A long-term consequence of these omissions has been that "art-historical and literary anthologies and accounts, following on from the primary versions, have perpetuated this paucity of accounts of female participants" (Hemus 2009); that is, Dada tends to be evaluated within a self-sustaining and overwhelmingly male critical tradition of exclusion. Second, the self-promotion of women artists, which is "key to the longevity of an artist's work," remained much more low-key than that of those men who left "memoirs, which, predictably,

emphasize the [male] author's key role in the movement" (Hemus 2009). In other words, male artists exaggerate their importance to the canon, and often do so at the expense of their female colleagues.

It is in the very areas that are crucial to the beginnings of Dada and Surrealism – aesthetic distinctiveness and innovation – that the neglected significance of women artists becomes most critically pressing. For example, Amelia Jones emphasizes as a key element of the movement the "*performativity* of Dada … its opening up of artistic production to the vicissitudes of reception such that the process of making meaning is itself marked as a political – and, specifically, gendered – act" (Jones 2001, 142–143). The involvement within dada performances of women artists as singers, reciters, choreographers and dancers, and performers, is almost entirely neglected by many critical accounts of Dada and the avant-garde, notably Peter Bürger's influential *Theorie der Avantgarde* (1974). Such artists included Maja Kruschek, Mary Wigman, Suzanne Perrottet, Emmy Hennings, Sophie Taeuber, and Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. Eliza Jane Reilly notes that the latter's performances prefigure "by half-a-century innovations like body and performance art" (Reilly 1997, 26). Women artists are thus central as producers and performers to a key dimension of Dada's early challenge to conventional art-historical notions of the aesthetic, a dimension critically neglected in part due to its ephemerality and its overtly anti-art positioning.

Since the 1980s, critical discussions of women dadaists have proliferated. Key works include William A. Camfield's 1983 exhibition catalogue *Tabu Dada: Jean Crotti and Suzanne Duchamp, 1915–1922*, co-edited with Jean Hubert-Martin; Maud Lavin's *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (1993); Britta Jürgs' untranslated collection of essays *Etwas Wasser in der Seife* (1999); a collection of essays by Naomi Swaleson-Gorse entitled *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender and Identity* (2001); and the Whitney Museum of American Art's 1996 exhibition, curated by Francis M. Naumann and Beth Venn, and its catalogue *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York* in 1996, as well as its conference panel on "Women and Dada" in 1997. All these books and events emphasized and promoted the prevalence and significance of women artists in Dada. Curatorial interventions in exhibitions like Modern Women (2010), Rrose is a Rrose is a Rrose (1997), Daughters of New York Dada (2006), L'Amour Fou (1985), Angels of Anarchy: Women Artists and Surrealism (2009–2010), In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico (2012), La dona, metamorfosi de la modernitat and Donna Avanguardia Femminista Negli Anni '70 dalla Sammlung Verbund di Vienna (2010) have also had a major and complex role in rethinking Dada and Surrealism, and have formed and deformed various canons.

In contrast to the more recent revaluation of women's involvement in Dada, their contributions to Surrealism have historically been subject to alternating cycles of critical attention and neglect. Robert James Belton asserts that the first thinker to point out and analyze "the central flaw of Surrealism in its failure to grant Woman her subjectivity" (Belton 1995, xix) was Simone de Beauvoir, whose *Le Deuxième sexe*, published in 1949, questioned Breton's double valorization of and disempowerment of the figure of Woman: "Will she be capable of the poetic activity that makes poetry happen through a sentient being: or will she be limited to approving her male's work? … Breton does not speak of woman as subject" (de Beauvoir 1997, 260).

Much feminist scholarship of Surrealism has (like second-wave feminist literary criticism) focused on "rediscovering" and re-evaluating women artists as subjects rather than objects of representation (e.g., Mary Ann Caws, *The Surrealist Look: An Erotics of Encounter*, 1999; Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros: 1938–1968*, 2005).

Scholars have sought to demonstrate how the artistic subjectification through self-representation, enactment, and self-imaging (Jones 2004) of women surrealists positions them as precursors to and influences on the developments of modern and postmodern art practices and identity politics (e.g., Georgiana Colvile and Annie Richard's guest-edited special issue "Autoreprésentation féminine," *Mélusine*, 33, 2013; Whitney Chadwick's *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism and Self-representation*, 1998). In the wake of de Beauvoir's early criticism, feminist scholarship's arguments have elaborated the nuances of relations between "male" Surrealism, women artists, and feminism. There are several examples of this tradition of critical engagement. Notably, French feminist Xavière Gauthier's *Surréalisme et sexualité*, a key reference text on Surrealism and sexuality, was published in 1971 and subsequently in Italian (1973), Spanish (1976), and German (1980). Gauthier develops de Beauvoir's arguments in *Le Deuxième sexe*, scrutinizing surrealist representations of "Woman" and cataloguing various male-constructed surrealist stereotypes such as child-woman, muse, erotic object, and mythical being. She asserts that "[l]a femme surréaliste est une forgerie de mâles" (the surrealist woman is a male invention; Gauthier 1971, 190). In a key historical "silencing" of the feminist critical tradition, there is as yet no published English translation of this book. Angela Carter actually translated the text into English in 1972, as its themes "resonated with [Carter's] political, intellectual, and aesthetic concerns at this point in her career" (Watz 2010, 104), but, in response to negative comments by editors at Basic Books and Calder and Boyars, Carter decided not to publish her translation.

Katharine Conley's *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism* examines the problematic nature of woman's position in Surrealism. She argues that Breton's (and wider surrealist) theories have "anticipated feminism as a movement" (Conley 1996, 140). Conley identifies points where connections between the "surrealist avant-garde and the French feminist avant-garde could be seen," for example "in the muse figure of the Immaculate Conception." Within this framework, she argues, women artists such as Jacqueline Lamba, Elisa Breton, and Unica Zürn

> unplug Automatic Woman's short-circuit connection to male poets and, by making her real, create a surrealist representation of Woman that is even more riveting. In their self-portraits, these women continue to be capable of scandalizing mainstream society because the behavior they describe is surprising and ignores all rules of social decorum. (Conley 1996, 145).

Likewise, Susan Rubin Suleiman argues: "The antipatriarchal and antitraditional impetus of Dada/Surrealist parody, no matter how ambiguous on a "deep" psychological level, provides a positive substantive link, as well as a formal allegiance, to contemporary feminist work – and to feminist play with tradition" (Suleiman 1990, 162). Janet Beizer states: "a certain late twentieth-century feminism ironically repeated the surrealists' embrace of fin de siècle hysteria as poetic liberation" (Beizer 1993, 2). In contrast, Rosalind E. Krauss argues against this feminist scepticism in her catalogue essay for *L'Amour Fou* (1985):

> It must be seen that in much of surrealist practice, woman, in being a fetish, is nowhere in nature. Having dissolved the natural in which "normalcy" can be grounded, Surrealism was at least potentially open to the dissolving of distinctions that Bataille insisted was the job of the *informe*. Gender, at the heart of the surrealist project, was one of these categories. If within surrealist poetry *woman* was constantly in construction, then at certain moments that project could at least prefigure a next step, in which a reading is opened

> onto deconstruction. It is for this reason, that the frequent characterizations of Surrealism as antifeminist seem to me to be mistaken.
>
> Krauss (1985, 95)

Gloria Orenstein's "The Women of Surrealism

The spring 1973 issue of *The Feminist Art Journal* included Gloria Feman Orenstein's essay "The Women of Surrealism." This key document is crucial to an understanding of how patriarchal criticism has responded to feminist interventions to re-evaluate Dada and Surrealism. Gwen Raaberg describes Orenstein's essay as "one of the first investigations" (Raaberg 1991, 1) to address the near total absence of women artists from previous histories of surrealism. "Meret Oppenheim's fur-lined teacup," Raaberg notes, "was a tiresomely repeated exception" (Raaberg 1991). The significance of Orenstein's essay becomes clear when we note its subsequent publication history. In 1975, the *Journal of General Education* (vol. 23(1), Spring 1975) reprinted it (under a new title, "Art History and the Case for the Women of Surrealism") in a special issue, edited by Robert Lima, entitled "Surrealism: A Celebration." It was reprinted again in the key French feminist volume *Obliques: La Femme Surréaliste* (no. 14/15; Paris, Winter 1977–1978). The two American versions were published in the midst of the American feminist art movement, and (as Orenstein remarks) 1975 also celebrated the UN's International Women's Year.

The editorial organization of "Surrealism: A Celebration" exemplifies the tensions and dynamics in feminist research into Surrealism at a historical moment when Western second-wave feminism was in full swing, and demonstrates Western androcentric art history's resistances to feminist scholarship. Orenstein's interest in the "women of Surrealism" developed from her research on Surrealism and the contemporary theater, which led her to notice a surprising critical silence on Leonora Carrington's work:

> I began to correspond with Leonora Carrington. In one of her early letters to me she enclosed a clipping from the rotogravure section of a local Mexican newspaper that carried an interview with her, and several color reproductions of her recent art work. I was immediately struck by the fact that I had never seen any of these paintings before in any of the books on Surrealism, nor had I ever come across any monographic study of her work.
>
> (Orenstein 1975, 31).

"Surrealism: A Celebration" was based on a conference organised by Robert Lima at Pennsylvania State University (November 7–9, 1974), at which Orenstein and other contributors spoke. Lima introduces the special issue with a poem that includes the line "FINIs to the *Femme-Enfant*" (Lima 1975, n.p.). This refers directly to Orenstein's argument: "Surrealism," she writes, "was ridden with paradoxes and fraught with puzzling contradictions. For, although Breton in his many writings had extolled the special psychic gifts and talents of women, the specific type of woman that he admired most was the *Femme-Enfant*, the Woman-Child" (Orenstein 1975, 32). For Orenstein, this homogenizing construction of women – and of surrealist women artists – raised several questions. "How could a woman in her mid-fifties, as these women obviously were now, continue to identify with the ideal of the Woman-Child?" and "In what way or to what extent did this myth of the *Femme-Enfant* actually conspire to guarantee the exclusion of the artistic work of the more mature woman from recognition either within the surrealism movement itself, or from acceptance within the mainstream of art history as a whole?" (Orenstein 1975).

Orenstein's essay discusses an international range of artists, across a variety of media, and clearly demonstrates their significance for Surrealism, as well as their political relevance as forerunners of 1970s feminism. She explores the work of Leonor Fini, "a precursor of the women's movement in her conscious and intelligent exploration of themes relating to woman's identity" (Orenstein 1975, 36). She discusses Toyen as "one of the main founders of the Czech surrealist group" (Orenstein 1975, 47), and Jane Graverol as co-founder of the group TEMPS MÊLÉS. She analyzes Leonora Carrington's feminist stance evident in her *Women's Liberation Poster* design from 1972, and through her prose: "I knew that Christ was dead and done for and that I had to take His place, because the Trinity minus a woman and microscopic knowledge had become dry and incomplete" (Orenstein 1975, 38). Meret Oppenheim's interest in matriarchal symbolism is scrutinized, and Orenstein argues that the endless citing of the *Fur-Lined Teacup* in exhibitions and publications as mimetic of Oppenheim's entire oeuvre is a patriarchal reduction. She notes Oppenheim's own critical and subversive intervention into this reductive practice through the production of an edition of 120 fur-lined teacups and saucers as a "satire on her own legend" (Orenstein 1975, 44). Orenstein further discusses Remedios Varo's representations of woman as "alchemist, scientist, inventor, explorer and cartographer" (Orenstein 1975, 47) and Bona de Mandiargues' contributions to exploring "woman's identity" (Orenstein 1975, 49). She also examines Marie Wilson's conceptualizations of male and female emancipation; Susana Wald's significant revaluations of ceramics as artistic media, and her connections of Surrealism and gender equality; Dorothea Tanning's painterly explorations of the "dehumanization of woman overwhelmed by the consequences of unquestioning acceptance of the dictum 'biology is destiny'" (Orenstein 1975, 47–48); and Ellen Lanyon's reworkings of women's domesticity by drawing on surrealist traditions, alongside her shared interest, with other artists in this listing, in spiritual and magical symbolism.

The page of "Surrealism: A Celebration" following the editor's poem reproduces "Signatures of Surrealists." The reproduction and sequence of these signatures radically challenges traditional canonizations of Surrealism. It is led by the pairing Julien Levy and Leonora Carrington, and acknowledges the revised tradition established by Orenstein's research by including Graverol, Wald, Oppenheim, and Fini. It is clear from this that Orenstein's work, presented at the conference, significantly impacted on Lima. This special issue includes two survey essays, Marcel Jean's survey of Surrealism, and J. H. Matthews' exploration of Surrealism in theater and cinema. Jean's authority is clear from his contributor's biography, which describes him as a "surrealist painter" and author of "several collections of poems … volumes on Art, modern thought, an anthology of surrealist writings, and *The History of Surrealist Painting*" (Lima 1975). Jean opens his piece on "Views on Surrealist Art" by stating that "The task of a historian is not an easy one when he deals with art movements of the past but it becomes still more difficult when contemporary schools are concerned" (Jean 1975, 11). He offers a canonical list of male painters culminating in Arp and Ernst, describing them as the "true ancestors of surrealist painters." This list of male artists leads to the claim that:

> The historian is often tempted to see the succession of events and personalities of the past as a diagram showing links that would represent influences between artist, or as a sort of genealogical tree. I claimed to be no more than a storyteller, yet I seem, a little to my surprise, to be describing surrealist painting as such a tree, of which Chirico would be the trunk.
>
> Jean (1975, 11).

Jean continues with this androcentric genealogy: "A rather inadequate image as far as Arp and Miró are concerned: Miró is very near Arp, and Arp is in his turn, in his Concretions, not far from Tanguy; but neither Miró nor Arp is Chirico's son. It should be admitted that they are adopted children; such children become, by law, legitimate heirs" (Jean 1975). Later he notes "However with the two main Belgian surrealist painters, Magritte and Delvaux, the genealogist may feel reassured. They evidently belong to the family" (Jean 1975). Jean omits Graverol's significance as co-founder of TEMPS MÊLÉS and its review, established by Orenstein, and indicated in the inclusion of her signature in the "Signature of Surrealists" page. Jean mentions and discusses many more names of lesser- and well-known male surrealists in constructing his peculiarly same-sex "family" of male lineage, but finds space only briefly for a few women. With alarming predictability, he notes Oppenheim's fur-lined *Object* (1936); he mentions Leonora Carrington, "who … for several years the companion of Max Ernst, painted dream pictures" (Jean 1975, 15) and Kay Sage: "Tanguy had married the American poet and painter Kay Sage, who put an end to her life five years after the death of her husband" (Jean 1975, 17).

Orenstein's essay is followed by J.H. Matthews's "Spectacle and Poetry: Surrealism in Theatre and Cinema." Matthews was another leading authority in the field at the time, a professor of French at Syracuse and author (his contributor's biography states) of "ten books on Surrealism" (Lima 1975). His essay fails to mention any women filmmakers; key figures like Maya Deren and Nelly Kaplan, for example, are wholly absent from his discussion. Even when he discusses a film directed by a woman he re-attributes it by categorizing it by its scenario: "Echoing Aragon's remarks, Artaud went on to comment, "The cinema is a remarkable stimulant." … Hence Artaud wrote his scenario *La Coquille et le Clergyman* (published in 1927)" (Matthews 1975, 56). Often hailed today as the first surrealist film, Germaine Dulac's *La Coquille et le Clergyman* is the only film Matthews mentions where the *director's* name is omitted, and the film is thus implicitly attributed to a male "author." Women are also absent from his discussion of theater, despite Orenstein's recent critical attention to Carrington, and despite the significant theatrical innovations of women such as Elena Garro, Joyce Mansour, and Carrington. These artists receive attention in Orenstein's book *The Theater of the Marvelous: Surrealism and the Contemporary Stage* which, according to her biographical blurb, had already been published earlier in the same year as "Surrealism: A Celebration" and would thus have been available to Matthews.

This insistent exclusion of women artists from accounts published alongside a key essay that demonstrates their importance to Surrealism suggests the following possible conclusions. If the involvement of women artists in Surrealism was truly little known at the time, even to well-established surrealist scholars, then Orenstein's research is remarkably innovative and reveals (as it does) major flaws in the work of Matthews and Jean. But Orenstein's essay was first published in 1974, and was well-known, as is evident from its subsequent international republications. She also presented her findings at the conference probably attended by Jean and/or Matthews. Even if they were not present, one would expect that her major "discovery" of women artists playing significant foundational roles in Surrealism would have been perceived as radical, as would her polemical urging for their inclusion in the canon: "we must begin to rewrite art history immediately. We must document the long-forgotten history of women in the arts through bibliographies, interviews, articles, books, video tapes, films, and all sorts of archival material to serve as tools for future research" (Orenstein 1975, 52).

So even if both men had not attended the conference or read Orenstein's original essay, its post-conference reception within surrealist scholarly circles, its explicit and timely advocacy of intellectual change, and Lima's obvious editorial support combined with his role as conference organizer and journal editor, would have made the essay impossible to

ignore. Indeed, to ignore Orenstein's essay would be deliberately to suppress or erase the importance of women artists to the 1970s understanding of Surrealism's histories.

This critical erasure of feminist interventions, and the successful androcentric writing-out of women artists from history, to the point where later critics like Orenstein must "rediscover" them, is a repeated pattern. Women artists were not "rediscovered" in the 1970s, by critics like Orenstein, for the first time. Orenstein's essay was first published only 30 years after two landmark exhibitions on women avant-garde artists associated with Dada, Surrealism, and abstraction, was held by Peggy Guggenheim at her New York gallery Art of This Century, the major venue for the establishment of modern art canons, which ran from 1942 to 1947. As the "critical meeting place and the transitional space between the European and the American avant-garde," Art of This Century was central to many key developments in modern American art. As Siobhán M. Conaty notes, "The New York School and Abstract Expressionism could not have developed without the mixture of ideas and styles that manifested themselves at Art of This Century" (Conaty 1997, 15).

In this highly significant and visible venue Guggenheim hosted two of her most controversial shows, which attracted significant attention because they were dedicated solely to women avant-garde artists, many of whom were associated with Surrealism. Both *Exhibition by 31 Women* (which ran January 5–31, 1943) and *The Women* (June 12 to July 7, 1945) were, Conaty suggests, "groundbreaking events" (Conaty 1997). For the 1943 exhibition, the artists chosen were "primarily Surrealists and abstractionists" (Conaty 1997, 17). Conaty points out that Guggenheim's survey focused on

> illustrating women's substantial contributions to the most advanced art movements of the day. In Art of This Century's Exhibition by 31 Women, the cutting edge of new Surrealist ideas and modern abstraction were juxtaposed on the gallery walls. The intentionally provocative show attempted to set the record straight with serious work, dispelling the myth that women's art is at best a decorative medium.
>
> Conaty (1997)

Artists exhibited in these two shows were "by no means excluded from exhibitions at other venues, including the Museum of Modern Art and the commercial galleries of Pierre Matisse and Julien Levy" (Conaty 1997). Many of these artists were already "well established to the public, including Leonora Carrington, Leonor Fini, Kay Sage, and Frida Kahlo" (Conaty 1997), and given the venue's status all the artists exhibited would have been well known in avant-garde circles. These exhibitions should have firmly established the position of women artists in surrealist traditions simply by presenting them as already-known figures within those traditions.

However, Orenstein's apparent "*re*discovery," 30 years later, of these women artists who were "well-established" in 1943, demonstrates the effectiveness of the strategy of omitting women artists from art historical narratives, as does her struggle, in the 1970s, to locate information in histories of Surrealism about women artists and more specifically about Carrington.

Dada, Surrealism, and their Heritage?

The strategy of exclusion is clear when reviewing one of the exhibitions generally considered as central within the traditional history of Surrealism, William S. Rubin's Dada, Surrealism, and their Heritage, which was held from March 27, 1968 to June 9, 1968,

at MoMA (a museum notably founded by three women, Lillie P. Bliss, Mary Quinn Sullivan, and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller in 1929: McCarthy 1991, 196; Butler and Schwarz, 2010). Susan Rubin Suleiman notes that "Among the dozens of artists mentioned by Rubin, the only woman is Oppenheim, whose fur-covered teacup (1936) is perhaps the best-known Surrealist object. It has also been, almost invariably the *only* work by Oppenheim mentioned or displayed in books or exhibits on Surrealism" (Suleiman 1990, 210).

The exhibition's press release states that this is "the first comprehensive exhibition anywhere of these movements since the Museum presented its now classic show in 1936–37" (MoMA 1968) (this earlier exhibition of course included Oppenheim's *Object* as the only contribution by a woman). The press release mentions many male Dada artists, but no woman artist; Oppenheim is the only female surrealist noted, specifically (and despite her vast multimedia oeuvre) *Object*, and Nikki de Saint Phalle is the only woman artist to be represented amongst the contemporary artists in the show. This exclusion of women continues in the catalogue. The chapter on "Surrealism in Exile and After" ignores Guggenheim's two major exhibitions. The entry for 1943, the year of *Exhibition by 31 Women*, reads:

> **NEW YORK**
>
> March. Publication of *VVV: Almanac for 1943.* Cover by Duchamp.
>
> Baziotes, Motherwell, and Pollock invited to participate in a collage exhibition at Art of This Century.
>
> November 9–27. Art of This Century. *Jackson Pollock: Paintings and Drawings.* First one-man exhibition.
>
> (Rubin 1968, 214).

Similarly, the 1945 entry omits *The Women*, and, indeed, any other reference to women artists, instead citing *Mark Rothko: Paintings* as that year's most relevant exhibition in Art of this Century (Rubin 1968).

Rubin's repeated reference to Art of this Century indicates that it was one of the most significant exhibition venues in New York at the time, and that he studied and was familiar with the Gallery's exhibitions. That he also knew about Guggenheim's feminist interventions is clear from his 1968 acquisition (following a "lead"; Greenberg 1971, from Clement Greenberg during Rubin's research on Pollock) of two paintings by Janet Sobel, *Milky Way* (1945) and *Untitled* (c.1946). Greenberg suggested that it was not Mark Tobey, but Sobel's automatic technique, which significantly influenced Pollock's evolving style at the time: "Tobey first showed his 'white writings' in New York in 1944, but Pollock had not seen them when he did his own first 'all-over' pictures in the late summer of 1946 … Back in 1944, however, he had noticed one or two curious paintings shown at Peggy Guggenheim's by a 'primitive' painter, Janet Sobel" (Greenberg 1971, 218). While Greenberg positions Sobel as a key influence on Pollock and thus on the beginning of American Abstract Expressionism, there seems to be a mismatch between the date and place of Greenberg's recollection. Sobel exhibited in 1944 at the Puma Gallery, as part of a group exhibition; however, given his reference to Guggenheim, it seems that Greenberg misremembered the dates of her show and is in fact referring to the 1945 *The Women* exhibition. Guggenheim also curated a Sobel solo exhibition in 1946, and Sidney Janis included her in the landmark Abstract and Surrealist Painting in America exhibition: "More and more her work is given over to freedom and imaginative play. Her autodidactic techniques, in which automatism and chance effectively predominate, are improvised according to

inner demands … Janet Sobel probably will be eventually known as the most important surrealist painter in this century" (Janis 1944, 97). Despite this praise, it was not until 2001 that Sobel held another solo exhibition, at Gary Snyder Fine Art in New York.

Rubin's Dada, Surrealism and their Heritage now appears as a strangely reactionary art event during a revolutionary feminist period, a time in which feminism itself was markedly prominent. In the years immediately preceding the exhibition, significant feminist works like Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, the same year as John F. Kennedy's Presidential Commission on the Status of Women released its report on gender inequality, were already bestsellers. The exhibition took place in a year when Women's Liberation groups were emerging across America, and the first Women's Liberation Conference took place; 5000 women of the Jeannette Rankin Brigade demonstrated against the Vietnam War at the opening of Congress; the New York Radical Women staged a "Burial of Traditional Womanhood" in January, using the phrase "Sisterhood is Powerful" for the first time; and on June 3, six days before the exhibition closed, Andy Warhol and art critic and curator Mario Amaya were shot by Valerie Solanis, whose S.C.U.M. (Society for Cutting Up Men) manifesto had been self-published in 1967, making her sufficiently well-known in New York art circles for Maurice Girodias to contract her for a novel based on it. Amid this flurry of prominent feminist activity, women artists working in and with surrealist traditions would surely have been obvious choices for inclusion.

Rubin's huge survey volume, *Dada and Surrealist Art*, published in London in 1969, reproduces and expands on much of the information in the exhibition catalogue. Penelope Rosemont, in her important collection *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*, points out that, in relation to women surrealists, Rubin's book offers "undoubtedly"

> the most amazing omission … In this oversize volume of 525 pages, not one woman surrealist is discussed. Leonora Carrington is represented by one postage-stamp-sized reproduction; Méret Oppenheim is dismissed in one sentence; Frida Kahlo is mentioned once in passing. Marcelle Loubchansky, Maria Martins, Mimi Parent, Judit Reigl, Kay Sage, and Toyen – to cite only women whose work figures in André Breton's *Le Surrealisme et la peinture* (1965) – are completely ignored.
>
> Rosemont 1998, liv).

Jeffrey Wechsler notes in his revisionist exhibition Surrealism and American Art, 1931–1947 at Rutgers University Art Gallery in 1977 (which includes a range of women artists such as Helen Lundeberg, Jeanne Reynal, Julia Thecla, and Margaret Tomkins), that:

> Both Dorothea Tanning and Kay Sage … are well known within the movement and have kept Surrealism unquestionably uppermost throughout their artistic careers, yet more often as not they are "missed." … Rubin's large study only reproduces one picture each by Sage and Tanning, in a section entitled "Documentary Illustrations."
>
> Wechsler (1977, 24)

The persistence of androcentric narratives is clear in the subsequent republications of Rubin's book. The 1978 reprint fails to redress the exclusion of women artists, and reproduces verbatim the selective historical narratives of 1943 and 1945 mentioned above. Rubin's book is completely unaffected by the significant feminist research – including Orenstein's essay – on women artists and Surrealism during the 1960s and 1970s, or by the highly visible activities of the feminist art movement precisely to expose such exclusions of women artists (Rubin 1978, 470).

Rubin also ignored women when they were well-represented in comparison with male artists. The *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition in New York, 1942 is summarized in the chronology of all editions of *Dada and Surrealist Art*:

> *First Papers of Surrealism*. Exhibition sponsored by the Coordinating Council of French Relief Societies. Twine webbing installation by Duchamp; participants include Arp, Bellmer, Bruner, Calder, Chagall, Duchamp, Ernst Francés, Giacometti, Frida Kahlo, Kiesler, Klee, Lam, Matta, Magritte, Miró, Masson, Moore, Richard Oelze, Onslow-Ford, Picasso, Seligmann, and Tanguy. Motherwell, Hare, Baziotes, Jimmy Ernst are among the young Americans shown.
>
> Gordon (1978, 470)

Yet women were significant as sponsors (11 out of 21) of this exhibition, and the page facing the "Foreword" asserts the central presence of women artists in the exhibition and in Surrealism itself, citing Kahlo, Carrington, Sterne, Sage, Oppenheim and Barbara Reis-Remedios.

Rubin omits discussion of many key women artists, and consequently the value of his history of Surrealism is severely compromised. He makes no mention of Emmy Hennings or Baroness Elza von Freytag-Loringhoven; of Angelika Hoerle (who was at the center of the Cologne Dada group, and, according to Angelika Littlefield, was, along with her husband, a key figure in the group; Littlefield 1988); of DYN co-founders Eva Sulzer and Alice Rahon (with Wolfgang Paalen); of Lundeberg, the co-founder of New Classicism; of Lilia Carrillo, an influential member of the group *La Ruptura*; of international figures within Surrealism and its developments in the 1940s such as Luchita Hurtado, Jacqueline Lamba, and Catherine Yarrow; of Lee Miller as co-inventor, with Man Ray, of solarization; or of Katherine S. Dreier and her leading role as collector, as artist, and as initiator and co-founder with Duchamp of the Société Anonyme.

Women Artists across Dada and Surrealism

The question of origins is an especially contested issue in feminist interventions into Dada and Surrealism. Feminist work on Dada has established a number of radical revisions to its traditionally "male" origins, and to its position as the very movement from which Surrealism itself claims to originate. Irene Gammel in *Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity: A Cultural Biography* argues persuasively that Baroness Freytag-Loringhoven was heavily influential on Duchamp's creation of his alter-ego Rrose Sélavy. If the Baroness pre-empts Duchamp's appropriation of the feminine, her work also challenges the authorship of one of the key objects of modernism, Duchamp's *Fountain*, which was entered into the 1917 Society of Independents exhibition in New York City (see Figure 4.1). Freytag-Loringhoven was, in Reilly's words, an "early creator of 'junk' sculptures and assemblages" (Reilly 1997, 26). According to Gammel, her collection of objects not only influenced Duchamp's notion of the readymade, but the urinal and its submission itself stem from her. Among the evidence Gammel provides is a letter by Duchamp to his sister stating: "one of my women friends, using a masculine pseudonym, Richard Mutt, submitted a porcelain urinal as a sculpture" (Gammel 2002, 223). Although there is some debate regarding how this information should be interpreted, it implies that the Baroness should be seen as a covert *Mutt[e]R* of Dada and Surrealism (see also Chapter 4).

Ruth Hemus (2009) highlights how Emmy Hennings was co-founder, together with Hugo Ball, of the Cabaret Voltaire, and shows how she was subsequently dropped from art historical narratives of this foundational moment. Rubin, for example, assigns the foundation of Cabaret Voltaire to Ball alone, despite easily available statements in historical documents such as Richard Huelsenbeck's *En Avant Dada: A History of Dadaism* (1920) that it was "a little bar where Hugo Ball and his friend Emmy Hennings had set up a miniature variety show, in which all of us were very active" (Huelsenbeck 1981, 23). Like other women artists discussed above, Hennings was far from little-known during Dada's heyday, as is clear from newspaper reviews and other documents, such as a 1916 letter from Ball to his sister: "Emmy has the greatest success. They translate her verses for Bucharest. She has a whole colony of friends there. The French are kissing her hand. They love her beyond words" (Hemus 2009, 34).

Hemus notes other practices within which women artists worked and innovated, such as "doll-making, embroidery and tapestry" (Hemus 2009, 12). Like dada performances, these were crucial for dada and surrealist aesthetics, but were regarded by some male artist colleagues, and particularly by subsequent androcentric art historical narratives, as secondary to "high art" male practices. As Thomas F. Rugh points out in the first publication on Hennings in 1981, she was (together with Sophie Taeuber) instrumental in introducing puppets into dada art:

> In March 1917, at the opening of the Gallery Dada, a political puppet show was improvised, using Hennings's puppets Czar and Czarina. Hennings was evidently the first to initiate the use of puppets within the Dada group, and as the Dadaists became more politically active (especially in Berlin), puppet shows became integral parts of their soirees. George Grosz produced satirical Dada marionette performances at the Cabaret Schall und Rauch in Berlin, and in Dresden, Otto Griebel created a Dada puppet version of *Lohengrin*.
>
> Rugh (1981, 3)

A photograph of Hennings's dolls and puppets was also published in the first and only issue of *Cabaret Voltaire*, in 1916, together with her poems *Morfin* and *Gesang zur Dämmerung*. While later male surrealist practices make extensive use of mannequins and female automata, and the figure of the doll is conventionally associated with representations of passive femininity, suggesting woman as pygmalionesque object and thing to be played with, the dolls of Hennings and Sophie Taeuber, predating male appropriations of the trope, clearly indicate that the doll is firstly a site of feminist innovation and intervention in Dada, and subsequently in Surrealism.

Women dadaist uses of the doll establish a specifically feminist artistic tradition, which can be understood in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a "minor literature," that which "a minority constructs within a major language" ("minority" meaning a politically oppressed or excluded group; Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 15). They argue that the "cramped space" of a minor literature "forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 17). Seen in this light, the exploitation of a trope like the doll by women artists is always already political. It transforms the doll's significance, wresting it away from the "major" (patriarchal) meanings it has historically accrued. Feminist appropriations of the doll from within Dada and Surrealism invest it with new, potentially subversive significances.

This can be traced in literary tropes like Djuna Barnes's character of Frau Mann (Mrs. Man), the "Duchess of Broadback" from Berlin, a trapeze artist in her surrealist-influenced 1936

novel *Nightwood*. According to Gammel, Barnes' Duchess is the "Baroness (von Freytag-Loringhoven) in the flesh … pivotal to Barnes's attraction was the Baroness's androgyny" (Gammel 2002, 192–193). Frau Mann is described as seemingly having

> a skin that was the pattern of her costume: a bodice of lozenges, red and yellow, low in the back and ruffled over and under the arms, faded with the reek of her three-a-day control, red tights, laced boots – one somehow felt they ran through her as the design runs through hard holiday candies, and the bulge in the groin where she took the bar, one foot caught in the flex of the calf, was as solid, specialized and as polished as oak. The stuff of the tights was no longer a covering, it was herself; the span of the tightly stitched crotch was so much her own flesh that she was as unsexed as a doll. The needle that had made one the property of the child made the other the property of no man.
>
> Barnes (1961, 13)

Barnes' Duchess of Broadback is, in Gammel's words, a "perfect hermaphrodite … presenting … the toy body of a doll, the genitals desexed as through transgendered surgery. As the costume morphs into corporeal reality, the emergent body is a perfect hybrid, toy and artist, male and female."

Gammel's comparison is clear when reading George Biddle's description of Freytag-Loringhoven:

> She stood before me quite naked – or nearly so. Over the nipples of her breasts were two tin tomato cans, fastened with a green string around her back. Between the tomato cans hung a very small bird-cage and within it a crestfallen canary. One arm was covered from wrist to shoulder with celluloid curtain rings, pilfered from a furniture display in Wanamaker's. She removed her hat, trimmed with gilded carrots beets, and other vegetables.
>
> Biddle (1939, 41)

As Gammel has demonstrated, until her death in 1927 the Baroness was significantly influential and well known in European and New York avant-garde circles. Works by her were included in Guggenheim's 31 Women exhibition in 1943. Once revealed, her influence can be traced in Schiaparelli's fashion designs and in another feminist appropriation of dolls, Claude Cahun's re-enactments of dolls as radical gender experimentations. In 1927, Cahun lived nearby Freytag-Loringhoven in Paris; according to Gammel she would "certainly have heard about the Baroness from Jane Heap and Georgette Leblanc, Cahun's friends" (Gammel 2002, 366).

The hybridity of the Duchess's body in Barnes's novel also evokes a number of other doll references in works by Dada women artists, such as Sophie Taeuber's *Dada Head*'s (1918 and 1920, preceding both Miró's representations of heads and Giacometti's elongated figures). Hannah Höch's circus character, the *Dompteuse* (*Tamer*), a photo-montage with collage from c1930, belongs to Höch's wider oeuvre of puppets and photo-montages of dolls. *Dompteuse* explores notions of hybridity, the morphing of male and female, in the representation of a figure that consists of the fragments of an Asian porcelain face pasted onto a feminine-looking torso, but with muscular, hairy arms, combined together with a skirt which seems to be a fragment from a fashion shoot.

Dolls and mannequins took center-stage in the major Centre Pompidou exhibition *Le Surrealisme et l'object* (30 October 2013 to 3 March 2014), a twenty-first century exhibition continuing the tradition of constructing narratives of Surrealism by excluding

women's contributions. According to the exhibition press kit, Bellmer's *Die Puppe* is allocated a separate room, affording it privileged status. The first room of the exhibition, "Ready-mades and mannequins," is introduced thus:

> Ten years before the creation of Surrealism, Giorgio De Chirico and Marcel Duchamp invented two objects in 1914 that were to gain enduring currency in the imagination of the movement. The former introduced the image of the mannequin into his painting; the latter bought the bottle rack that became his first ready-made. From Hans Bellmer's *Doll* (1933–1934) to the dummies lining the "streets of the 1938 "International Exhibition of Surrealism," mannequins made a regular appearance in Surrealist events. The Manifesto of 1924 presented the mannequin as one of the most propitious objects for producing the "marvellous" sought by Surrealism, and for arousing the sense of "strange uncanniness" inspired in Sigmund Freud by his discovery of a doll in a tale by Hoffmann.
>
> Centre Pompidou (2013)

Again, the female and feminist lineage of Dada and Surrealism – and specifically the centrality to dada and surrealist traditions of women's experimentations with the figure of the doll – is erased completely from this account. No mention of Henning, the Baroness, Barnes, Cahun; the lead artists associated with "objects that appeared in the context of Dada" are identified instead as "Duchamp, Man Ray, Arp." Even Duchamp's bottle-drying rack was originally planned as a collaboration with a woman artist, Suzanne Duchamp, as revealed in a famous letter from January 1916 (the press release mis-dates the *Bottle Rack* as 1914) where Duchamp writes to Suzanne: "I'm making it a 'Ready-made,' remotely. You are to inscribe it at the bottom and on the inside of the bottom circle, in small letters painted with a brush in oil, silver white color, with an inscription which I will give you herewith, and then sign it, in the same handwriting, as follows: [after] Marcel Duchamp" (Hemus 2009, 130).

The press kit's list of "Artists and Works" cites 44 individual artists and one group (Hemus 2009). Of these, eight are women, few enough to list their works: a photograph by Cahun, *Poupée 2* (1936), positioning her chronologically after Bellmer's doll photographs; Marcel Duchamp's collaboration with Mimi Parent, *Boîte alerte* (1959); Gala Eluard (Gala Dalí)'s *Objet à fonctionnement symbolique* (1931) (described as "Destroyed object, Photograph, recent print"); Valentine Hugo's *Objet* (1931) ("Photographic print, 2013"); Mona Hatoum's *Hair Necklace* (1995); Oppenheim's *Ma gouvernante* (1936); Mimi Parent's *Masculin/Féminin*; four photographs by Cindy Sherman, one *Untitled # 187* (1989) and three from the *Untitled*, *Sex Pictures Series* (1992); and Alina Szapocznikow's *Fotorzeźby [Photosculptures]* (1971–2007) consisting of 20 black and white photographs ("original gelatin silver prints, … shot by: Roman Cieslewicz"). If we count Szapocznikow's photographs individually, we have 31 pieces by women, compared to 136 works by men. Ironically this echoes the title of Guggenheim's 1943 show: *31 Women*.

The histories of Dada and Surrealism have repeatedly been constructed, in nearly all major critical accounts, as histories of male innovation, patrilinear tradition, and father-to-son- transmission of the revolutionary aesthetic impulse shared by each movement. Amelia Jones terms this "a simplistic notion of the avant-garde as a group of heroic (almost always white male) individuals fighting unequivocally against the evils of capitalism and the dumbed-down values of its mass bourgeois culture" (Jones 2004, 19). This mythology can only be sustained by a systematic and repeated suppression of other narratives that

record the extensive, influential, and highly prominent contributions of women artists to both Dada and Surrealism. To reconstruct these histories to recognize properly the works and influences of so many women artists would be to mobilize also the true revolutionary force that Dada and Surrealism repeatedly claim, and yet repeatedly negate in their masculinist fantasies.

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